

# **Private Institute Teaching in Cyprus: Is it effective?**

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I am a teacher at a Private Teaching Institute (PTI) for about two years and I teach chemistry, physics and cosmetology to 60 students mainly of lyceum level as well as 75 college students. From October 2005 to December 2006, I conducted a project during my postgraduate WBL studies with Middlesex University. My project title is *PTI in Cyprus and their effectiveness*. The reason why I have chosen to research about the effectiveness of the PTI in Cyprus is firstly because I am a teacher at a PTI and secondly because recently the number of PTI in Cyprus has increased and the fact that many of them are illegal according to the legislation of the Republic of Cyprus, prompted me to investigate their quality of teaching.

The aim of this project was to investigate whether PTI, including the one I work in, are effective teaching schools and help students obtain high grades in order to pass their exams for furthering their studies abroad or locally. Also, to realise what is required of one, including myself, to become an effective teacher.

My objectives were to examine any complaints coming from students and parents about the institutes, investigate students' and parents' expectations of their teachers and also in what areas teachers need improvement.

My research questions I wanted to answer concerned students' expectations of teachers, the quality of the students' relationship with teachers, the complaints coming from students and parents about the institutes and whether students were satisfied with the quality of their instructors' teaching.

The research approach I chose to follow was the Case Study which is suitable for complex issues and when in-depth investigation is needed. My research strategy is both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative data sources I used included observation, interviews and a learning diary and the qualitative data source I used was the questionnaire technique. My research is mainly a primary one because it is not based on existing data.

I have used a General Observation Technique because I wanted to observe many things such as the teacher's techniques, the students' responses etc. As far as the Questionnaire Technique I opted for a closed-form structure in which the responses were predetermined. I also used a checklist item type which provided the respondent a number of options from which to choose. Furthermore, I used a structured Interview Technique in which the questions to be asked are predefined. I used this as it allowed the possibility of comparing the answers between different interviewees, something I needed because in my research I had to compare the answers of the students, teachers and parents of three institutes in Cyprus.

My sample was of three PTI in Cyprus which remained anonymous for ethical purposes. The total number of students, parents and teachers I questioned was 156. I interviewed 45 people and observed 3 teachers one of each institute.

The advantage I had as an Insider Researcher was that I approached parents as well as students with confidence, since I had formed a good relationship with them and the disadvantage was that I was getting negatively biased towards the other institutions involved in the study. The way I have overcome this bias was simply to stop paying attention to the negative comments and not allowing anyone to influence me.

Also I kept a learning diary which helped me realise that working autonomously has many advantages such as developing a self structure for work time and other commitments.

As far as the qualitative part of my research (interviews, observation) I have used the Contents analysis method of the data collected, in which I located all the theme categories that appeared during the answers of my sample.

As far as the quantitative part of my research (questionnaires) I have used the Descriptive analysis method, in which I found the percentages of the answers of each question for the parents, teachers and students of each institute.

Below are shown the findings of my research concerning Institute A, B and C.

### **Institute A**

Negative findings

#### **1. Class Organisation**

Only 23% students were satisfied.

#### **2. Discipline**

A lot of misbehaviour was going on during the lesson and the teacher was unable to control the students.

#### **3. Students' progress**

58% of teachers were not satisfied.

Positive findings

#### **1. Administration**

69% of parents were satisfied by the action taken from the heads to resolve their complaints.

#### **2. Students' evaluation**

The institute assessment system is good and there is a policy from the institute to get teachers to give regular tests and for strict marking in order to assess student progress.

### **Institute B**

Negative findings

#### **1. Discrimination**

Only 23% of students answered that there was no discrimination.

#### **2. Extreme strictness**

Teachers are very strict; as a result students are afraid of them and therefore less confident to communicate with them during the lesson.

### **3. Open parent evenings**

Only 30% of teachers said that they were happy with the frequency.

Positive findings

#### **1. Effective teaching**

60% of students rated the following as good: student progress, teacher's motivation and encouragement during the lesson, good explanation of queries, teacher's good knowledge of curriculum etc.

## **Institute C**

Negative findings

#### **1. Legislation**

It is considered not legal.

#### **2. Inconsistency with hours**

66% of students answered that they were not happy with the teachers' punctuality.

#### **3. Open parent evenings**

Only 25% of teachers said that they were happy with the frequency.

#### **4. Teacher work experience**

Teachers are not very experienced as they claimed during the interviews that the maximum teaching experience they had was one year.

Positive findings

#### **1. Teacher motivation**

This is indicated by the students' answers to the questionnaires (70%) and also during the class observation I felt the enthusiasm.

#### **2. Students' progress**

Students noticed progress since attending at the institute which indicates that even though the teachers teaching methods are not very good the enthusiasm and motivation they transmit to students makes them want to put a better effort in learning the lessons.

#### **3. Addressing queries by students**

Teachers always spend extra time answering students' queries after and during the lesson.

Some common problems I noted for all three institutes concerned the facilities which were not adequate to support students' needs. Also, visual aids, group work and open parent-teaching evenings were not carried out very often.

According to my findings the first research question I wanted to answer was "What are students' expectations of teachers?"

I found out that students expect of teachers the following:

1. Mark their work satisfactorily, meaning that they mark students homework or tests fair without showing discrimination or favouritism towards some students.
2. To be improved cognitively comparing to what they knew before enrolling on the programme of the institute.
3. Have good knowledge of the National Curriculum and any Examination Board curriculum.
4. Provide supplementary work beyond that of the school books.
5. Have a comprehensible way of talking during the lesson.
6. Be enthusiastic in the classroom.
7. Be punctual and organised.
8. Encourage them through praise and reward.
9. Allocate time to each student at the end of the lessons if someone has any queries.
10. Frequently revise previous work through tests.
11. Use visual aids.
12. Carry out group work during the lesson.
13. Set a satisfactory amount of homework.
14. Motivate and encourage them during the lesson.
15. Not to show discrimination against some students.

The second research question was “What is the quality of the students’ relationship with teachers?”

I found out that students from Institute A are not satisfied with the quality of their instructors, whereas students of Institutes B and C are.

The third research question was “Are the students satisfied with the quality of their instructors’ teaching?”

I concluded that students from institute A are not satisfied with the quality of their instructors, whereas students of Institutes B and C are.

The final research question I wanted to ask was “What are the complaints coming from students and parents about the institutes?”

I concluded that students and parents of:

Institute A, complaint that no progress is marked since their children started private lessons at the institute and are not very happy with the teachers.

Institute B, complaint that teachers are very strict and show discrimination against some students. Also, they do not use visual aids at all.

Institute C, complaint that the facilities and organisation of the institute are not very good.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

PTI in Cyprus have still a long way to go till they reach a high standard of teaching and some common problems I noted are:

1. There are not enough facilities to support students' needs.
2. Not enough parent-teacher evenings.
3. No visual aids.
4. No group work.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **INSTITUTE A**

1. A smaller number of students should be placed in each classroom, so as to avoid a lot of noise being created during the lesson. Thus, the teacher will be able to control the students and the students will be able to pay more attention to the lesson and thus comprehend it better.
2. As far as the misbehaviour of students is concerned, the students who cause trouble in a specific class should be separated from each other and be placed in other classes if possible.
3. Teachers should attend seminars on class organisation and control of students.

#### **INSTITUTE B**

1. All discrimination should be stopped immediately and a policy prohibiting this should be put introduced by the heads of the institute. Also, a special complaints department should be created for this purpose, where students should be able to freely express their complaints.
2. The institute heads should facilitate the employment of younger teachers with more modern views on how to handle students, therefore making students feel less intimidated by them and more confident with their teachers.
3. All teachers should attend seminars on new effective teaching methods, in order to renew their teaching skills and to bring them up to date.

#### **INSTITUTE C**

1. It should become legal and make the necessary changes in order to be able to get a Government license. The changes that have to occur in order to be able to do so are the following:
  - (a) Toilets for both genders
  - (b) Proper new teaching furniture
  - (c) Proper heating and air cooling system
2. Teachers should be qualified to teach, have at least a teaching diploma in their field and one year experience.

3. The heads of the Institute should organise the teaching hours better so that staff should be more punctual and also introduce a policy forbidding last minute lesson cancellations; all lesson cancellations should be announced to parents and students at least one day before.

My recommendations for all institutes are:

1. Better facilities (libraries, computer rooms)
2. Open parent evenings
3. Visual aids
4. Student group work

This research study has been a great experience for me as for the first time I have come to realise what effective teaching is... It has created a vast source of learning for me; I have come to realise that each teacher is unique and this “uniqueness” is transmitted through their teaching skills during the lesson.

I hope that in drawing together many strands of experience, both of my own and of other teachers, I have presented information which will be of use to individual instructors. In highlighting the various problems identified during my study, I have attempted to increase the knowledge base of private institutes with a view to helping them become more effective in encouraging students’ development.

Finally, I would like to mention again that though the findings and conclusions of this project are limited and cannot be generalised, due to the small sample of institutes investigated, they are nevertheless indicative of the existing situation, since the sample is very representative.

At the end, I would like to say that PTI in Cyprus have a long way to go in order to reach a high standard of teaching and I at least hope that the conclusions and recommendations I have made for the three Institutes investigated, will be acknowledged by the heads and form the basis towards improving these private institutions.

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